

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913) 1932 S17 Mataco S17
Toba S112
Chorotisk 6

No 1) Indian Tribes of the Argentine and Bolivian Chaco.

111

in their magical dances and conjurations the Indians as a matter of fact most often deal with these particular evil spirits.

These are features common to the religious beliefs of all Indians of the Chaco: indeed they are found among all South American Indians. But even in the Chaco this general belief in spirits appears in somewhat different forms among different tribes. The *Choroti* fancy that the spirits, *möhsek*, in their external appearance have the shape of old, withered men (*kihilahs*). They are, in the imagination of the Indians, provided with wings, which enable them to move rapidly through the air. Owing to their bird-like appearance the spirits are also called *ahuañ* (the birds.). They are countless in number, mostly invisible, and as a general rule evilly disposed towards mankind. I never met an Indian who professed to have seen a *möhsek*, but nearly all say that they have heard their voices at night. One peculiarity of the demons of the Chaco Indians is that they only exist at night. As soon as darkness sets in the *Choroti* Indian fears mysterious dangers from the *möhsek*, who are then believed to draw near the villages in great numbers and even to enter into the huts, visiting the inhabitants with sickness and death. This is the reason why a traveller living with the *Choroti* can hear from some house nearly every night the low chant of some old man accompanied by the dull sound of the rattle gourd, *pelite*, with which he tries to conjure and keep off the supernatural pests. At daybreak however the spirits are supposed to leave, for the forests and the plains — with a piping or whistling sound, the Indians explained to me, which they are very clever in imitating. For this purpose the *Choroti* use a special kind of round whistle which they generally wear hanging round the neck as an ornament. At their religious dances they produce, from time to time, shrill whistling sounds with these whistles, professedly with a view to conjuring the *möhsek*. The Indians believe that they can keep supernatural beings at bay by imitating them in their external appearance or their sounds.

In the Chaco many weird sounds are heard at night which are apt to fill the natives with superstitious fear. The *Choroti* frequently told me about the nightly whistling of the spirits (*yap möhsek ahuañ*). The peculiar piping or whistling which is most often identified with the sound of the spirits is, I believe, produced by certain insects living on the stems or branches of the trees. The spirit of the tusca tree was specially mentioned to me, but this spirit is said to be a 'good' being.

The idea of the *Choroti*, that the spirits have the shape of old men, has given rise to a peculiar and cruel custom. They do not allow their

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776 old men to die a natural death, but when they grow very weakly and
 888 sickly they kill them with an arrow-shot in the heart, whereupon they
 766 burn them with all their property instead of burying them, which among
 the Choroti is the general mode of disposing of the remains of the dead.
 The reason which they gave me for this custom was that if an old man is
 allowed to die a natural death he will be changed into an evil demon
 (*möhsek*), who will rage in the village and kill all the people. This, accord-
 ing to their idea, can be prevented by giving the old men a premature,
 violent death.¹⁾ In order to understand this custom we must, moreover,
 [1754] take into consideration that to the mind of these Indians all aged men are
 more or less versed in the magic art, i. e. are sorcerers, and the spirits of
 sorcerers are specially feared.

775 The fact that old men and sorcerers are believed to be transformed
 after death into evil *möhsek* seems to suggest that these spirits or demons
 are nothing but disembodied human souls, who have in the after-life been
 changed into supernatural and mostly evilly disposed beings. As a matter
 of fact, the death-spirit residing in the grave where a dead body has been
 buried is called *möhsek* by the Choroti. Like most other primitive peo-
 ples the Choroti fear the burial-places because they fear coming in contact
 with the spirit^s haunting these place^s. It seems therefore evident that at
 any rate the souls of certain persons are changed into *möhsek* after death.
 The word *möhsek* may therefore be best translated into 'ghost'. The
 Indians only use it of the disembodied souls or spirits of dead men, but not
 of the shadow-like 'double' of a living person, for which they have no
 particular word. Even when speaking of a recently departed person they
 generally simply use the expression *yäl*, i. e. 'the dead one'. *Möhsek* parti-
 cularly seems to have reference to the spirits of men who died long ago, and
 these spirits as a rule are more evilly disposed and more feared than the
 spirits of Indians recently departed.

776 The Choroti, like other Chaco Indians, do not deify inanimate objects
 of nature to the same extent as many other South American tribes. Yet

[114] ¹⁾ Nordenskiöld's categoric statement as to the practice of infanticide and
 parricide among the Choroti therefore is not correct. ('Der Mord beschränkt
 sich auf den Kinder- und Elternmord'; and: 'Wenn ein Indianer seine alte
 blinde Mutter oder seinen verküppelten Vater tötet, so befreit er sie selbst
 von einem Leben das ihnen eine Last ist und sich selbst von einer Extramühe
 im Kampfe ums Dasein.' (*Indianerleben*, p. 38). As I have stated above, the
 killing of parents is limited to old men, and this custom must wholly be ex-
 plained from the superstition of the Indians. Infanticide again is limited to
 the cases mentioned by me in a previous chapter.